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Financing Basic Teacher Education in Ghana: Looking Beyond Traditional Funding Sources

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ABSTRACT It is argued that one specific condition for development is education and the teacher is the ultimate defender of its reality. Yet basic teacher training in many countries, especially the developing countries has not had stable and efficient funding. This paper explores the role of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) in augmenting the traditional sources of funding for basic teacher education in Ghana in the wake of a new teacher training programme that requires heavy funding to sustain it. It is a qualitative study based on a limited number of semi-structured interviews with teachers of teacher training colleges in Northern Ghana as well as documentary sources and other available information. The conclusion is that the PTA could be an important supplement to government efforts if well organised and managed.

Key words: Basic Education, Teacher Education, Financing Education, Parents-Teacher Association, In-In-Out Teacher Training

Introduction

It is argued that one specific condition for development is education and “the teacher is the ultimate defender of its reality” (Adegoke, 2003). According to Carnoy (1999), if nations’ desire is to raise the cognitive skills of their young population through schooling, they will

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have to depend on autonomous, motivated, diligent and skilled professional teachers trained in public institutions to do so. In educational systems, the teacher is seen as a central figure to achieving quality education; as such, the shift to concern for quality education is particularly important due to the strong link of education to productivity and national development (Naidoo, 2006).

However, despite efforts by governments, especially in developing countries, to keep teacher training sustainable and efficient, there is clear evidence of lack of stable national policies on teacher supply and demand, quality, funding, curriculum and development (Lewin and Stuart, 2003), partly due to inadequate funding and a lack of political will. Research on the cost and financing of teacher education in selected developing countries indicates that funding arrangements are unpredictable and irregular, which creates an unstable financial environment for teacher training (Lewin and Stuart, 2003). One of the factors accounting for this is the present economic problems faced by developing countries. These have significantly affected their budgetary allocations to such areas as teacher education that have traditionally been financed by central government. In view of this, the exploration of new sources to supplement traditional funding sources could be more urgent than ever if teacher training is to be kept at sustainable level to meet growing enrolments at the basic education level in developing countries. Against this background, this paper explores the concept of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) to determine the role it could play in financing basic teacher training in Ghana in the wake of a new programme of training dubbed In-In-Out. Data were generated from documentary sources and semi-structured interviews with a sample of twenty five teacher trainers from three Initial Teacher Training Colleges in the Northern Region of Ghana. Interviews were centred on the process of the new programme, resources, trainers' role and the financial implications. The rationale for the use of semi-structured interviews was, first, to complement documentary sources as well as triangulate the data and, secondly, to help obtain implicit and explicit information. Its flexible but focused features created the opportunity to obtain research-relevant information in the process of interviewing by taking advantage of situations to include issues that were initially

overlooked or skipped, as well as restructuring the pattern of questions.

Context

Ghana is a developing country located in West Africa, occupying an area of 239,460 sq km with an estimated population of about 21.2 million with an annual growth rate of 2.4%, based on 2003 data (UNDP, 2005). A recent United Nations Human Development Report indicates that the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita stands at US\$369 and an annual growth rate of the economy (1990 – 2003) at 1.8% (UNDP, 2005). The annual economic growth has been higher than most countries in sub-Saharan Africa, averaging 2.3%, due to the introduction of economic reforms in 1983. From independence in 1957 until the mid 1970s, Ghana had a favourable economy but this fell sharply, partly due to falling prices of cocoa in the international market. Because of this, in 1983 the country adopted the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Structural Adjustment Programmes, which among other things called for strengthening the private sector of the economy and reductions in public spending. Some economic growth was recorded but it did not have a meaningful impact on the economy. As a result, the government formulated a number of [rolling] development plans, including 'The National Long Term Development Plan: Ghana Vision 2020' in 1995; and 'The Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy' in 2000 and 2003 (Government of Ghana, 2003). In 2001, Ghana also joined the Heavily-Indebted Poor Countries Initiative. Due to low average income per head, heavy strain is put on public provision of resources for education, health, water and sanitation. One important characteristic of the economy is its heavy reliance on international support, both donor nations and international lending agencies such as US, United Kingdom, Denmark, the IMF and World Bank. There are also numerous international non-governmental donor organisations, such as the United Nations, Oxfam, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Action Aid, operating in the country.

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Education Reforms

In the 1960s, Ghana's educational system was adjudged one of the most developed in the African continent due to the advances made at all levels of the educational system (Anamuah-Mensah, 2002). By the mid 1970s, the educational system was acknowledged as being in crisis due to the unfavourable economic situation that resulted in inadequate essential provisions such as instructional materials, conditions of service for teachers and poor quality of instruction as a result of increased numbers of untrained teachers. Against this background, in 1987, there was an Education Reform Programme directed towards equipping children to live productive lives and to make education more relevant to the socio-economic needs of the nation. This was to 're-orient and improve the quality and relevance of the curriculum, moving away from a purely academic focus towards one that combines skills acquisition and attitudes formation' (Anamuah-Mensah, 2002). The structure was changed from 6-4-7-3 (6 years primary, 4 years Middle, 7 years secondary and 3 years university education) to 6-3-3-4 (6 years primary, 3 years junior secondary, 3 years senior secondary and four years university) (Government of Ghana, 2004b). To increase participation in basic education, in 1996, a policy of Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education, enshrined in the country's 1992 Constitution, was operationalised and supported by agencies such as USAID, Department for International Development (UK), the World Bank and the United Nations Children's Fund (Kyereme et al, 2002). It is debatable whether these changes have really resulted in increased participation in basic education.

In Ghana, formal education is mainly financed from four major sources, namely: The Ministry of Education budget, Ghana Education Trust Fund (GETFund), District Assemblies and from donor organisations. Although publications are not able to provide current statistics on Ghanaian government expenditure on education and the proportion covered by other funding sources, the 2005 Human Development Report suggests that in 1990 public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP was 3.2% (UNDP, 2005). *The Report of the President's Committee* puts the total public expenditure on education in the year 1999/2000 at 3.9% of the GDP; with about 75% – 80% allocated to

pre-tertiary, 12% – 15% to tertiary and 5% – 10% for the Ghana Education Service (GES) headquarters (Government of Ghana, 2002). According to a preliminary report from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MOEYS), in the past five years to 2004 an average of 64.2% of Ghana Government's budget on education is allocated to the basic education sector, 13% for senior secondary, 5.1% for teacher education and 14.8% for the tertiary sector (Government of Ghana, 2005). The report states that resources available are far less than the cost involved in implementing education sector development plans, hence the urgent need for additional resources from regional assemblies and donor agencies. The implication of this development is that private sector involvement in funding education is becoming crucial as national education policies are being influenced by external donor interests and 'conditions' such as those of the World Bank and IMF.

The situation of teacher training in Ghana is not different from the financial predicament, although within the past decade or so, the government has increased funding and embarked on extensive policy deliberations and restructuring of the teacher training system to support the new educational system implemented in 1987. Since independence in 1957, various state policies directed towards the expansion of education at the basic level have led to massive increases in enrolment in basic education from 450,000 in 1957 to over 4,000,000 today (Benneh, 2006). Despite this expansion, there has not been a proportionate expansion in the number of teacher training colleges which has resulted in the present situation in which nearly 30% of teachers in basic education schools are untrained (Benneh, 2006). Presently, there are two levels of teacher training in Ghana, the basic Initial Teacher Training Colleges, designed to produce teachers to teach at the basic level, and Graduate Teacher Training, carried out mainly in two universities. The scope of this paper will be limited to the basic teacher training level.

Teacher Education

The history of teacher education in Ghana can be traced to Christian Missionaries, when they opened the first teacher training college at Akropong-Akwapim in 1848 (McWilliams and Kwamina-Po, 1975).

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Since then teacher education has gone through a series of changes to meet emergency situations (McWilliams and Kwamina-Po, 1975; Akyeampong, 2003) influenced by religious, political or contemporary ideologies, which reflected the type of teacher produced. First was a four-year teacher-training programme, followed by a two-year certificate-B and Post-B programmes that were designed to meet the growing need for more teachers in the country. Then the Certificate-A (Post-Secondary) and the Two-year Specialist programmes. In 1978, all these programmes were phased out giving way to a 3-Year Post-Secondary Teacher Training Programme, which has since gone through different reforms. Under these regimes, funding was directly from central government (for public institutions) and to some extent from religious bodies (for religious institutions). It is worth noting that the rationale for the various restructurings was first and foremost to produce enough teachers to reduce the high numbers of untrained teachers in the system, and secondly to upgrade the qualifications of teachers to meet the raising standards required to teach.

Structure of Initial (Basic) Teacher Education Training

The current structure of basic teacher training in Ghana is designed to provide a three-year pre-service Diploma in Basic Education which is divided into Programmes A and B to prepare teachers for teaching in primary and junior secondary schools respectively. The strategic mission of teacher training in Ghana is to “provide comprehensive Teacher Education programmes...that would produce competent committed and dedicated teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning in Ghanaian classrooms” (Adegoke, 2003, p.6). An innovative and challenging component of the new teacher training programme is the ‘Out’ component of the In-In-Out programme. According to the Teacher Education Division (TED, 2000), the In-In-Out scheme is a restructuring of the existing teacher training curriculum. It was initially designed as a training programme of 3 years duration leading to the award of Post-Secondary Teacher’s Certificate-A, and later (in 2004) upgraded to a three-year Diploma programme as part of a national policy strategy to raise teachers’ entry level skills. The first two years is spent on the college campus. During the third year,

the teacher trainees undertake work-study or supervised placement in schools, where they are attached to permanent class teachers to work with them. At the school level, trainees teach and continue to study with the support of distance learning materials. There is a support system for trainees comprising of distance learning/study materials, study centres, supervision and District Office support. Distance learning/study materials involve the identification and training of writers, the distribution of study materials and funding. The establishment of study centres throughout the country involves management and instructional activities for link tutors, mentors and other tutors. District office support is made up of other cooperating supervisors drawn from district education offices and unit education offices.

The old system of training was considered to be lacking in scope and contents in terms of systematic forms of teaching skills and work experience. The idea or philosophy behind the new system is based on a task-oriented and competency-based training, where the opportunity will be created for trainees to relate theory to practice. Practically, this is in close resemblance to the UK Postgraduate teacher training scheme in which trainees spend over half of the one year intensive programme in primary/secondary school settings. It is anticipated that by this, competent and advanced skill teachers will be trained to deliver the training. However, since the implementation of the In-In-Out scheme, there has not been any major national evaluation programme to examine the progress or otherwise of system. The analysis here will be based on data generated from the interviews with a number of teacher trainers and critical evaluation of available information.

Financial Implications of the In-In-Out Programme

From the brief insight into the operation of the “out” component through literature and interviews about the new training scheme, it is important to consider the financial challenges that have emerged and possible future financial implications that are likely.

One highlighted advantage of the programme is that output of colleges would increase by 40%, assuming college facilities were utilised to the fullest. New students would be admitted during the “out” year, thus increasing the student trainee population from about 6,000 to

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9,000. This could result in a decrease of the unit cost of training a teacher (Acheampong et al, 2000). The situation is that there have been some unspecified percentage increases in the number of students in the teacher training which have resulted in the demand for expansion and recruitment of more tutors. According to the State of the African Report (2003), the President of Ghana disclosed that the number of students in teacher training colleges has increased from 6,000 in 2000 to 8,500 in 2003 (Boston University, 2003). Recent research sponsored by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) on teacher education in Sub-Saharan Africa recommended among other things that staff numbers and quality should be tackled seriously if Ghana is to achieve its teacher training mission (Adegoke, 2003). This situation [mass training of teachers] is resulting in a rise of the cost in teacher education, thereby adding to the financial burden on central government.

The level of additional workload that has been generated by students during the “out” year has also led to the shedding of any cost reduction, because more working hours have been required or even additional tutors, which means more funds are needed to pay for the additional services. Respondents hold the view that cost of training teachers at this level has increased despite the fact that the current allowances paid them for supervision during the out year is wholly inadequate.

Furthermore, there have also been increases in non-salary budgets due to the frequency of school visiting by mentors (from regional directorates) and other supporting bodies to fulfil the provisions of the programme. At present, link tutors are paid allowances when they visit students in communities. These monies are paid directly from the Teacher Education Division of the Ghana Education Service. Pre-analysis of the financial implications of the programme by the Ministry of Education revealed that dependence on extensive and elaborate external support during the “out” year will increase the operational cost of the programme and might be unsustainable (Government of Ghana, 2000).

The creation of study centres and production of study materials is another area that has increased the cost of teacher training. Although

the proposed Study Centres to support students during the 'out' component of their training are yet to be fully released, the magnitude of the cost of the establishment and management of the study centres and the production of study materials could be huge, depending on the creativity of students in using locally available materials/resources to make study materials without compromising their effectiveness.

Initially the programme was anticipated to result in the reduction of the unit cost per trainee in the sense that teacher trainees were expected to fully take up classes so that regular teachers would be re-assigned to other vacant classes. The allowances paid to trainees could be thought of as salaries, indicating no national replacement cost (Akyeampong et al, 2000). However, later considerations of the impact of such an arrangement led to its withdrawal. With the current arrangement of trainee teachers operating alongside regular teachers, any anticipated cost savings may be negligible. A recent study of the new In-In-Out programme at the Graduate Teacher Training level at the University of Education revealed that a major problem of the new programme has been the huge financial implication for the university that has to do with the question of finding funds to manage and sustain it (Amedeker, 2005).

Financing Basic Teacher Training in Ghana

Issues relating to cost and financing of teacher education have often not been seriously considered in debates about educational development in Ghana and this has led to little understanding of the constraints on the development of teacher education and difficulties in making judgments about funding, efficiency and effectiveness of current methods of delivery (Akyeampong, 2003). Recurrent expenditure on teacher education as a percentage of total recurrent expenditure on education was estimated at 6.0% for 1998 and 6.7% for 1999. Government policy documents showed that out of the total resources allocated to education in 2003, 2004 and 2005, teacher education received 4.0%, 4.5% and 3.9% respectively showing an unstable funding policy for the sector (Government of Ghana, 2004a, 2005). Within the same period, teacher education received 0.2%, 4.5% and 3.9% of the total resources allocated to education by donor agencies. Although the dif-

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ference in proportion between government and donor resource allocations to teacher education is not clear, it is evident that financial contributions from other sources other than government is important. Analysis of government policy documents showed that over 90 percent of recurrent expenditure on teacher training is spent on salaries of training college teachers and non-teaching staff and the allowances paid to teacher trainees. Further analysis showed that only 10 percent of expenditure is allocated to other items such as maintaining the college infrastructure and provision of teaching and learning materials which are necessary for the efficiency and effectiveness of the colleges (Akyeampong, 2000; Baiden-Amissah, 2006). The unit cost of training one teacher through the three-year period is estimated at US\$2,100 representing \$700 a year. During these years trainees are not involved in any teaching except the third year teaching practice. By implication, there is a notional opportunity cost of two years of a primary teacher's salary.

The Role of the PTA in Financing Basic Teacher Training

According to Naidoo (2006), to be able to progress with positive developments in the midst of limited resources (economic, financial and human) it is important to take advantage of every resource and an example of such a resource is parents and the community. The participation and contribution of parents and the community has been found to be important in strengthening the funding and resources of schools in their communities. A research report by the World Bank indicates that the contributions of PTAs in various ways to school education are found to be common in many developing countries including Ghana (Kattan and Burnett, 2004). Schools have used this idea to resolve varied issues pertaining to the physical and psychological needs of the child at school.

In Ghana, PTAs have a long history of voluntary involvement in supporting their local schools (Chapman et al, 2003); however, there is limited literature on the concept. Notwithstanding this, practically all parents of pupils/students of a given school and its teachers automatically become members of the association. PTAs became very active and influential during the late 1980s when the new educational system

was launched. As a way to encourage community involvement in school activities, legislation was passed requiring all schools to form School Management Committees (SMCs). SMCs work hand-in-hand with PTAs, although in some cases tensions exist between the two.

Currently, the PTA system is more active at primary and secondary education; its main objectives are to provide material and financial assistance to the schools in which they exist. They are involved in such activities as putting up classroom blocks and/or dormitories, engaging part-time teachers, and providing school buses (Ghana Review International, 2006; Ghanaweb, 2006). PTAs are formed and operated at school levels (emerging trends show the formation at district, regional and national levels) and normally run by an elected executive comprising a chairman, secretary, treasurer, and organising secretary. Meetings are usually held shortly before the beginning of a school term. Operationally, they can be said to have a simple structure (Mintzberg, 1979). The main source of funds for PTAs is the annual levy paid by parents (only parents pay levies and have greater control). Apart from this, many PTAs have vehicles such as buses, tractors, water tankers and tipper trucks that operate commercially and serve as a source of funds. The government has not much control over the activities of the association, but may prevent them from undertaking projects or actions that are not in line with Ghana Education Service directives (Ghanaian Chronicle, 2002).

Challenges to the Effectiveness of PTAs

One potential challenge is the question of whether it will be possible to form PTAs in all the 38 teacher-training colleges in Ghana. This could be a very difficult question to answer, looking at the multi-faceted nature of the system. Currently, a very small number of training colleges such as St. Louis in Kumasi have a 'good' PTA system that serves the needs of the college. In some colleges, students have resisted authorities' attempts to set up PTAs for the reason that they were parents themselves and could not be in such an association considering the financial implications it will have. For example, an attempt to inaugurate a PTA in Tamale Training College in 1997 was strongly resisted by students and this led to the suspension of the initiative.

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However, the location of teacher-training colleges in relation to where parents live is another challenge to the effectiveness of PTAs. Unlike the elementary schools and most secondary schools where parents live close to the schools and are able to attend meetings and participate regularly in PTA activities, teacher training colleges are sparsely located throughout the country where students come from different towns and even regions. Here the coordination of activities and interaction among PTA members could be hampered due to travelling distances. To deal with this situation, efforts could be made to organise parents in the vicinity as a start. Their effectiveness could lead to the involvement of more distant members; they could also use the Internet as a means of communication.

The leadership and management of the PTA could be another potential challenge for its efficiency and effectiveness. At present, leaders are elected based, for example, on age and the influence a person has in the local community without necessarily considering his or her leadership skills. As such, the leader is seen as a family head and may command little respect from members. Incompetent executives may be vulnerable to the influences of interest groups within the association. Also, some school administrators might connive with weak executives to spend money on questionable projects for personal gain. An example of this is the case of the famous Achimota Junior Secondary School involving the headmistress who was alleged to have misappropriated about seventy eight million cedis (US\$12,000). This problem can be addressed by 'conscientising' members on the need to elect members based on the ability to lead rather than by social status and/or age. There should be openness in discussions and in decision making, while making efforts to use the symbol of the organisation to bridge the gap between the different interest groups, by trying to give answers to questions such as: What is the PTA really about? Who are we? What happened to our spirits and values? (Bolman and Deal, 1997).

Another limiting factor is 'embezzlement' or misappropriation of PTA funds by its officers. There have been reports of the embezzlement of huge sums of PTA monies by its executives (Ghanaweb, 2002). This incidence of corruption could have implications for fund-

raising activities of the PTA—for example, members may be discouraged from making regular contributions. People of high integrity and honest background should be encouraged to lead the associations. The Ghana Education Service (GES) should put in place mechanisms to check and regulate PTA activities, without infringing on the citizens' rights to form associations. For example, the GES might decide to render free audit services to all PTA associations.

Apart from this, the disparity in income among the PTAs as a result of membership size, income of members and the location of the college, among other things, could affect the PTAs' ability to provide financial assistance to local colleges. As well, the commitment of members to their financial obligation to the association will be a particular concern because the regular payments of dues will determine the level at which the PTAs can pursue their projects. The most important issue to consider here is to build up the enthusiasm of members' will power to make regular payments of their dues by initiating concrete and popular projects, while ensuring public accountability in every college. Another option could be to sacrifice some additional public funds to help the most lagging colleges to come up to levels closer to the more endowed ones. The absence of effective mechanisms to evaluate the performance of PTAs, as in the case of the Achimota Junior Secondary School mentioned earlier, could be a big challenge to the PTA. Effective evaluation should therefore be carried out regularly as a tool for accountability and to make wise decisions on programme planning and budget allocation (Weiss, 1998).

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the role of the Parent-Teacher Association in financing basic teacher training in Ghana, in the contexts of limited resources and the reform of teacher-training education. While the analysis confirms the importance of education in enhancing economic growth through the promotion of human resource development, the teacher at the basic level is seen as crucial in imparting knowledge and skills to children at this formative level of their development. The expectation that teacher education in Ghana can be funded by the government alone is unrealistic because of other pressing priorities of the

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government. This paper finds that the new In-In-Out training scheme is likely to raise the cost of teacher education because the cost of the 'Out' component of the scheme is prohibitively expensive, which may outweigh the benefits of the programme. The PTA, with all its challenges, could augment government efforts to finance some aspects of the teacher training process.

This paper is not able to determine the total amount of funding needed for basic teacher training in Ghana, the total amount provided by the government and the percentage of the total funding the PTA can handle, due to the lack of specific figures on funding basic teacher education. Some questions that still remain unanswered are: Will funding from the PTAs be enough to make up the difference in government finance for basic teacher education? What guarantees are there that funding from the PTAs can be sustained over time? Further research is indeed needed to help answer these and other questions.

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